

Written Testimony

Laura Lear

CEO, Community Support Services, Inc.

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Good afternoon. My name is Laura Lear and I am the CEO for Community Support Services, a nonprofit agency providing services to children and adults with developmental disabilities.

This June, the state will end the pandemic rules called appendix K that have been in place for three years and three months. The flexibilities allowed under appendix K helped providers and people receiving services both financially and in how they were allowed to receive services. While everyone wants to leave the pandemic behind, it will be very difficult to pick up and return to the funding and service requirements by July 1. CSS and other provider agencies as well as individuals and their families, will struggle during the next year to comply with the pre pandemic rules as well as transition to the new services and funding requirements as DDA moves forward with its new waiver and LTSS billing system.

We all watched in horror as the hospitals and nursing homes were pictured on the news; the suffering of those in need of care and the suffering of the doctors and nurses. There were no news stories though, of the thousands of individuals with developmental disabilities who lived in group homes or independently with support staff, or the families who depended on their children attending special education programs and therapeutic after school in order to continue to live safely in the family home. Individuals with disabilities, who often worked part time in places that closed such as restaurants or volunteered at nursing homes, all lost their jobs in March of 2020, and those who counted on attending community classes or recreational facilities, had to adjust to a completely different day schedule. Most individuals continued to require staff support, so like the workers in hospitals and nursing homes, our staff valiantly left their homes and went to work in group and family homes, followed the new PPE rules, spent hours sanitizing every place they touched, and kept clients away from others as many were unable to wear masks correctly. About a third of the individuals supported by CSS became positive for covid, and about half the staff. While we are deeply appreciative that there were no deaths among our clients or staff, these staff risked their lives to care for covid positive clients, took care of children with autism when their family members were positive for covid, and sometimes stayed away from their own

families in separate locations provided by CSS provided for weeks at a time to avoid infecting their own family members.

CSS and other providers had to make many changes in how to safely deliver services, how to fund them, and how to compensate employees for their essential work. We did that, and are coming out on the other side, but we cannot instantly rebuild and return to how services operated three years and three months ago. We have an historic shortage of support staff, and are increasing wages as much as possible, but we are also struggling with the higher costs of food and other goods.

The county has provided a match to the state funds received by providers for these services, called the DD supplement, for over thirty years. The supplement is divided among provider agencies, as state funding is not adequate in our county, where minimum wage, housing and other costs of doing business exceed other areas of the state.

We are asking that the DD supplement be increased by the cost of living determined by social security to be 8.7 %. Our value in the service to this community is clear, our services enable people with developmental disabilities to live and work as included members of their community, their family members are able to work and care for all their children, and we bring nearly 300 million dollars from the state into the county. The DD supplement is on average over many years, about 10% of the state revenue, a very good deal for the county, and an important factor in our county developing the highest quality and largest range of support services for our most vulnerable citizens. The DD supplement is truly a win:win. With the End the Wait bill at the state level, additional individuals will be eligible for DDA funded services in the coming year, and we need a healthy, prepared provider workforce to meet this need and opportunity. I urge you to increase the DD supplement by the cost of living of 8.7% and support providers, staff and citizens with developmental disabilities. Thank you.